

**THE VALIDITY OF *Dibamus nicobaricum*
(FITZINGER *in* STEINDACHNER, 1867)
(SQUAMATA: SAURIA: DIBAMIDAE)**

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Fitzinger's *in* Steindachner, 1867 *Rhinophidion nicobaricum* is shown to be a valid species of the genus *Dibamus* and redescribed based on material from Great Nicobar and Camorta, Nicobar Islands, India. *Dibamus nicobaricum* differs from congeners from continental and insular regions of south-east Asia in possessing the following characteristics: lanceolate infralabials; a single postocular; elongated head; complete rostral sutures; 23 – 25 midbody scale rows; 192 – 253 ventrals; 31 – 38 subcaudals; tail short (tail length as percentage of snout-vent length 8.73 – 18.27), and small body size (SVL of the largest example, a female, 134.7 mm).

Key words: *Rhinophidion nicobaricum*, *Dibamus nicobaricum*, Dibamidae, nomenclature, systematics, Nicobar Islands, India.

INTRODUCTION

Rhinophidion nicobaricum was described by Fitzinger *in* Steindachner (1867) based on a single specimen from the Nicobar Islands, India, collected during the voyage of the Austrian frigate 'Novara.' However, in the appendix of his report, Steindachner (1867:94) assigned the new species to the genus *Typhloscincus*. Subsequent collections of the species have been referred to variously as *Typhloscincus nicobaricum* by Stoliczka (1870) and *Dibamus nicobaricum* by Stoliczka (1873). The zoological collections made during the voyage of the 'Novara' were at first kept in a special exhibit (the "Novara Museum") in Vienna, and were eventually added to the official collection of the Naturhistorisches Museum (NMW), Vienna (Gans, 1955). A chronological list of publications based on collections made during the voyage of the 'Novara' can be found in Higgins (1963). The holotype of *Rhinophidion nicobaricum* could not be found in the Naturhistorisches Museum by Taylor (1963), although Greer's (1985) only Nicobarese material (NMW 23461) is clearly the type of *Rhinophidion nicobaricum* (see Tiedemann et al., 1994).

Boulenger (1887) included a single species of *Dibamus* in his monograph, *D. novaeguineae* Duméril and Bibron, 1839, and put Fitzinger's species in its synonymy. Annandale (1905) listed *Dibamus novaeguineae* from the Nicobars, based on two examples in the collection of the Indian Museum, Calcutta (now accessioned with the ZSI) and mentioned that they "did not call for any comments." The wide but disjunct distribution of the species (from the Nicobars and New Guinea) was thought remarkable, although collections were made subsequently from the Malay Peninsula and the Greater and Lesser Sundas (see Annandale, 1904; Boulenger, 1897; Brongersma, 1933; Roux, 1911; Weber, 1890). In the next major review of dibamid lizards, Smith (1935) recognized two species: an insular form (*D. novaeguineae*) from the Nicobars east to New Guinea, and one from the Asian mainland (*D. montanus* [Smith, 1921]) from Le Bosquet and Daban, in the Langbian Plateau, Vietnam. Several subsequent papers have improved our understanding of the relationships and species boundaries of these diminutive lizards that have never been collected in large numbers. The most recent review of the genus *Dibamus* was by Greer (1985) who recognized nine species, including three new ones. *Dibamus novaeguineae*, once thought to be a wide-ranging and variable species, was shown to be composed of several distinct species with restricted ranges. Greer resurrected Bleeker's (1860) *Typhlina leucurus* from the

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